

1609/1621
The INFLUENCE of COMPANY.

A
S E R M O N

Preached to
YOUNG PEOPLE,
A T
NEW BROAD-STREET, Dec. 26, 1768.

A N D
At ST. THOMAS'S, SOUTHWARK,
For the BENEFIT of the
CHARITY-SCHOOL, in Gravel-Lane,
January 2, 1769.

By JOHN PALMER.
Published at the REQUEST of the MANAGERS.

" First, on thy Friend, deliberate with thyself,
" Pause, ponder, sift; not eager in the Choice,
" Nor Jealous of the Chosen; fixing, fix;
" Judge before Friendship, then confide till Death.
" Poor is the friendless Master of a World.

YOUNG'S Night Thoughts—Night II.

L O N D O N:

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YOUNG PEOPLE

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 PROVERBS xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wise men shall
be wise : but a companion of fools
shall be destroyed.

MAN is evidently formed for so-
ciety : and, beside those connec-
tions, which natural relation has
established, or, into which he enters for the
sake of utility and convenience ; the social
disposition of his heart strongly prompts
him to single out some as his companions,
with whom he may cultivate a peculiar inti-
macy, and converse in a free and familiar
manner. So sensible are mankind in gene-
ral of the agreeableness of such alliances,
that scarce any one can be content to live
wholly without them. We see that persons
of every rank, high and low, rich and poor,
the learned and unlearned, have their select

acquaintance. And certainly connections of this kind may be so formed and maintained, as to be rendered at once highly pleasing and profitable: while, on the other hand, it is no less certain, and should be carefully attended to, that they may also prove extremely injurious. This principally depends on the characters of our associates. According as they are good or bad, we shall naturally receive either benefit or harm from them. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

It is usual with Solomon to speak of good and bad men under these two denominations, the wise and the foolish. And it is with apparent propriety that he thus describes them—As the former pay a supreme regard to the essential and most important interests of their being, and diligently use the best means for the attainment of them: while the latter substitute in the place of this most worthy object of their attention, some imaginary good, and in the pursuit of that take those measures which must necessarily subvert



vert the other. " He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." He will hereby get religious wisdom, or, be established and improved in this wisdom; which constitutes the true glory and supreme felicity of man. " But a companion of fools shall be destroyed."—He will be corrupted by them—will learn their evil practices, or be confirmed in them—and will thus be destroyed or ruined—That is—company has a considerable influence in forming our tempers and manners: it therefore highly becomes us, to take heed, whom we chuse for our companions. This is the plain intent of the observation in the text. And in further discoursing on it, we shall

(1.) Consider the duty which is incumbent upon us, in reference to walking with wise or good men, and avoiding the company of the foolish or wicked. To enforce which, we shall

(2.) Illustrate the truth of the observation in the text; or shew the effect of company
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on the dispositions and behaviour of mankind. We are

(1.) To consider walking with wife or good men, and avoiding the company of the foolish, or wicked, as a rule of duty. Every one may clearly perceive—that it cannot be obligatory upon us absolutely to limit our correspondence to the religious or good, so as to have no communication at all with persons of the contrary character. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, supposes that they could not avoid all intercourse with bad men: in order to that, he says * “they must needs go out of the world.” And what he suggests on this head is far from being peculiar to the time when he wrote. The number of the immoral and wicked has not been inconsiderable in every age and country: and common observation will not allow us to except ours out of this remark.

The ties of blood may have connected the good man with some, whose conduct he can by no means approve: in which case, though

* 1 Cor. v. 10

though they cannot be the objects of his esteem, while they continue in their evil practices, yet it is not surely the dictate of religion, suddenly and at once, to break off all intercourse with them. If, as our blessed Master has taught us, forbearance is to be exercised towards an offending brother who has no other claim to our regard but that he belongs to the one great family of mankind ; it must be more especially incumbent upon us to manifest this benignant spirit in the treatment of our own particular kindred, towards whom nature has implanted in us a peculiar affection. Nor can it be doubted by those who have any just knowledge of the human frame, that a mild and generous behaviour, mixed with proper exhortation, is, in general, a much more likely method, to reduce them to recollection, and bring about their reformation, than that rigour which would rashly impel us totally to desert them. But, if natural relation does not oblige to a correspondence with the foolish or wicked ; every one must be sensible that some such correspondence is necessary and unavoidable in common life. Nothing could
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be more absurd than to suppose that the man of business must only have to do with such as are wise in the sense of the text. Upon this principle, who does not at once perceive that trade must soon stagnate? And important as a regard to religion is, to secure just and honourable dealing among men, and to establish their usefulness to the community: it cannot be questioned that prudential and worldly motives have that weight on the minds of many, who are destitute of higher and better principles, as will warrant no small share of confidence in the transactions of commerce: and, in carrying on affairs of this nature, some acquaintance and converse must necessarily be kept up with the bad as well as the good. There is likewise a civil carriage, which we owe to men of all characters: and which, whatever their course of life may be, we should preserve, till by some notorious affront or injury it is forfeited. With this should be united a readiness to perform any offices of humanity for them, which their necessities may require, and in which we can with propriety,

propriety engage ; herein imitating our heavenly Father, who “ * is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.”

Walking with wise men, then, and avoiding the company of the wicked, considered as a rule of life, cannot be so understood, as if we were never to associate with the wise or good, or must have no intercourse at all with the wicked.

But, though some connection with bad men may be necessary, and certain circumstances may lead to a particular correspondence with them, yet in the intimacies we contract out of mere choice, or the alliances we form in the way of friendship, we ought to pay a principal attention to the characters of men in a moral and religious view ; regarding it as a main, essential qualification to our being thus connected with them, that they are possessed of that wisdom which religion teaches, and that they act under its influence. Some regard may no doubt be very properly had to other things. Every good person is not alike fitted to be our chosen

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sen companion and intimate: and highly as we may approve the characters of some, there may be valid reasons, which render a particular intimacy with them not so proper or agreeable as with others. In our closer and most familiar correspondencies, we naturally have respect to—a similarity in temper, taste, and way of life—and every one is unquestionably at liberty to select those, who are most suitable to him in these views, provided, at the same time, the accomplishments of true goodness in them. Otherwise, an agreeableness in the fore-mentioned particulars, and, in short, all other endowments and considerations whatsoever should be looked upon as very insufficient to endear them to us. The man of solid piety and virtue is far to be preferred before any other person, whatever his qualifications are, and much rather should we choose to have familiarity with none than with the sons of folly or wickedness.

The great importance of thus conducting ourselves, in the choice of our companions and friends, may easily be shewn; and is
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the second argument of discourse, to the illustration of which we now proceed.

That company has, in fact, a considerable influence on the manners of men, he who knows any thing of the world will readily allow. There is scarce any one, who, upon a little attention, will not discern its effects on himself, even in trifling and indifferent matters. It is not uncommon for us to fall into some imitation of those, with whom we freely converse: and this is apparently the case with respect to our moral temper and conduct. These are generally good or bad, according to the company we keep. So efficacious a mean of improvement is a familiar acquaintance with wise or good men, that, where it has subsisted for a long time, it seldom fails to yield much advantage. It is especially found to have an influence in forming the dispositions and manners of young persons, and very conspicuous is the benefit that some have hereby received. On the other hand, how notorious is it—that multitudes have been wretchedly corrupted by associating with the foolish

and wicked! They had, it may be, been blessed with a good education, and were not without some serious impressions on their minds. They had once a sensible conviction of the excellence of religion, and had fair for eminent attainments in wisdom and virtue. It was perhaps, an amiable temper—a sprightly wit—a winning address, or some other pleasing qualification that first induced them to seek the acquaintance. But what direful consequences has the alliance at length produced! How has the once well-inclined and promising youth degenerated from himself! Keeping company with fools, he has forgotten the instructions of wisdom, learned the evil ways of his associates, and at last become bold and daring in wickedness. Thus, fact and experience speak strongly in favour of Solomon's aphorism in the text—that “he who walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed,” or corrupted and ruined.

Nor is this hard to account for. A little reflection will fully convince us, that one or other of these effects may naturally be expected.

pected, according to the different characters of our companions. The connection between them may be thus easily traced out.

(1.) The conversation or discourse of wise men and fools tends to instill wisdom or folly into their companions. “ *Out of the abundance of the heart (says our Saviour) the mouth speaketh: A good man out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things. Not that it is the necessary characteristic of a good man to be always speaking on religious subjects. The common concerns of life are not only allowable, but very proper topicks of discourse: and there is likewise a pleasantry and mirth in conversation, to which religion is far from being an enemy. A truly good man will, however, be habitually careful, that the freedoms he takes are decent and becoming. He will set a guard over his lips, that they may speak right things: nor will religious wisdom be an ungrateful or unusual subject of discourse to him. And when he converses about religion, it will be with a view
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* Mat. xii. 34, 35.

to improve in it. He will treat the great principles and duties of it, in a manner becoming their importance; and seek to establish in himself and others a thorough belief and sense of them. And, in general, he will preserve that decorum in his speech, which reason and religion dictate. Thus "a good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things." On the other hand, "an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things." When irregular passions have gained the ascendancy in the heart, evil communications will naturally proceed from it. And to such a truly astonishing degree have some extinguished the light of reason and conscience which was in them, as openly to discard those doctrines of religion, which contain the plainest and most interesting truths: either exercising their malignant wit upon them, and boldly ridiculing the belief of them, as the height of absurdity; or, endeavouring to support and propagate their infidelity, by arts of sophistry, under the pretence of refined reasoning. But where this extreme dissoluteness of principle does not prevail, or is not however openly
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acknowledged and avowed ; the conversation of the wicked will still have no small tincture of evil in it. At certain times, and for especial ends, they may, indeed, speak as wise men : but their common and free discourse will be strongly impregnated with impiety or vice, and in one way or other clearly discover the folly that rules in their hearts. If they do not make a mock of religion, yet too frequently will they speak in a manner which religion disallows and condemns. Nor are sinners wanting, as occasion serves, in giving such representations of vice, as are deceitful, and have a sad tendency to corrupt good manners. The conversation then of the wise and foolish, or of the righteous and wicked will have no inconsiderable influence, in producing a similitude of characters in their respective associates. The one will be good and improving, the other evil and dangerous. Add to this

(2.) The force of their different examples, which will farther evince the propriety of Solomon's observation in the text, as a maxim founded on the best judgment of human

human nature. The example of the wise, or truly religious, gives us a most lively and impressivè idea of goodness; and thus almost irresistibly, attracts esteem, and excites to imitation. It shews us what we may be, and ought to be: and at the same time makes us more fully sensible, than any words can, of the amiableness of such a character. It awakens reflection—carries in it a pungent reproof of our errors or negligence—inspires a noble emulation—and, beyond all the arts of persuasion, actuates to diligence, in rectifying what is wrong and culpable, and improving that which is right and praise-worthy. But while good examples are likely to be thus serviceable to mankind; it is equally apparent, that bad ones tend to corrupt and injure them. The frequent sight of such is apt to weaken that sense of their odiousness, which is the natural impression of conscience, and which we feel upon the first view of them. The more familiar such characters are to us, with less abhorrence do we behold them: in proportion to which we must become more liable to be infected by them. And too

to often have persons been hereby drawn into ^{the} commission of those crimes, the very thought of which would once have filled them with horror.

It is equally certain, and will strengthen the argument to observe, that whatever influence example in itself has, the example of those, with whom we have contracted a particularly intimacy, and whom we value as friends, must derive additional force from our connection with them: and this, not only as their example will be more familiar to us, but as a desire of rendering ourselves agreeable to them will give weight to the example itself, and make us doubly solicitous to copy after it.

The doctrine of our text, then, has the united testimony of reason and experience on its side; and is one manifest proof, among many others, of the sound understanding of that eminent preacher of righteousness whose saying it contains. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." To associate with wise or good men, we have seen, is one na-

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tural, and very likely way to acquire or be confirmed in religious wisdom. And this wisdom, permit me here just to remark, is the principal thing. It is the necessary foundation of happiness, and will assuredly yield us the largest measures of it. "But a companion of fools shall be destroyed." He who chooses wicked men for his associates, it is naturally to be expected, and as is commonly true in fact, will learn their evil ways, the certain consequence of which must be misery and ruin. The companions of fools are not unusually brought into much outward trouble, and greatly injured in their worldly interests. But, however it fares with them in that respect, their vicious practices must necessarily incapacitate them for any real self-enjoyment; and there is a time approaching, when, unless repentance and reformation prevent it, the bitterest woe shall overtake them. Having been the companions of fools in their guilty pleasures upon earth; they shall, in the next world, be companions in a tremendous, but deserved, punishment, which, by the appointment of the wisest and most merciful of all beings, awaits

awaits them, and from which therefore none shall be able to deliver.

Whom, then shall we choose for our companions? Surely, none but the sons of wisdom, or, in the language of the Psalmist, them that fear God and keep his statutes. I am aware that reflections of this nature are peculiarly suitable to those who are in early life. But, at the same time, it cannot be unacceptable to the more advanced in this assembly, if I have called up to their recollection those just maxims of conduct upon which they have acted. And to many of this character, I hope, I am now speaking. You my christian friends have happily escaped the dangerous snare which has been pointed out, and felt that divine satisfaction in the good way in which you have walked, which you would not part with for the world. In vain, I trust, will it be for the seducer to tempt your wary feet. The sentiment of your hearts, confirmed by long and delightful experience is, * "Depart from me you evil doers; for I will keep the com-

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* Psal. cxix. 115.

mandments of my God."—The intoxicating draught—the profane jest—the midnight revel — the cruel triumph over deluded innocence — these have no charm to captivate your heaven-born and well-improved minds.—Ye are, by voluntary confession, as well as by the designation of providence, pilgrims and strangers upon earth, and have set your hearts on that better country, into which, * "there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth; neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie." And may the God of all grace, in his due time, grant unto you the desire of your souls; and enable you to give a dying testimony to that noble cause, which you have adorned by an exemplary life!

Those of you, whom the great Father of all the families of the earth has honoured with the parental relation; I would fain congratulate on the success of your endeavours to instill that wisdom, which has been the guide of your youth, into your beloved offspring. And I cannot avoid indulging the
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* Revel. xxi. 27.

pleasing thought, that there are parents before me, who are thus inexpressibly blessed in their children. Would to God that many more were partakers in your joy ! But, whatever be the event, the tender care and pious labour which a worthy parent has exercised, must be an unfailing source of self-satisfaction, and, beyond every other consideration, will soften the affliction of their disappointed hopes. Happy should I be, could I be at all instrumental in preventing the painful mortification.

With that view, from the more experienced and established, I would, then, direct my address to you my younger hearers, who have not yet passed the perilous season, who are just entering into the busy world, and whose connections are in a great measure yet to form. Such of you, as have shared the inestimable advantage of being under the tuition of wise and good parents have often been affectionately warned of the dangers which lie before you on the journey of life. You have been particularly admonished of that most fatal one, arising from
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the seductions of evil company, by which so many thousands have been ruined beyond recovery. To you, all I can say is only to enforce a steady adherence to the excellent instructions you have received from those best counsellors of your peace and safety. In the pathetic exhortation of our author, † “ My son, keep thy Father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest it shall keep thee ; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.” Whether you are still under the eye of these faithful guardians of your welfare, or are no longer subject to their inspection and controul : Let me beseech you—for their sakes, if they yet live : who have shown so constant and tender an affection towards you, and bestowed such incessant pains in watching over your early years. As you value their comfort, and would not bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave—For your own sakes also : as ever you wish to be happy in time and to eter-

† ch. vi. 20, 21, 22.

eternity—By all the sacred obligations you are under to the gracious author of your being, by whose providence you have been so highly favoured in the appointment of your lot—And, by the mercy of that compassionate Saviour, * “ who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father ”—By all these most engaging ties, I entreat and conjure you, to bear in mind the counsels of parental wisdom; and let not any evil communications defeat the influence of those amiable examples which have been set before you. “ My son, if sinners intice thee, consent thou not. ” — “ Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away. ”

There may be a mirth and gaiety in evil company to suit a vitiated fancy. But, how superficial and momentary is the enjoyment it affords! how great and lasting the mischief

* Gal. i. 4.

chief it may produce! It brings a snare to our souls, and its tendency is to final and irreparable destruction. The company of the wise on the other hand, is improving and salutary. And some there are who are agreeable and entertaining as well as good and useful associates. Let it then be the matter of our choice to walk with persons of this character. They only are worthy of the intimacies of friendship, And truly that friendship alone is deserving the venerable name, which is founded in religious wisdom, and conducted by its sacred laws. This is a friendship which will yield us solid comfort and pleasure---which the one supremely great and perfect being will crown with his favour---and the blessed fruits of which we shall reap through everlasting ages. For though death will separate us from our best friends, and interrupt the endearing connection for a time: thanks be to God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has encouraged the animating hope, that the sons of wisdom, the children of light shall ere long meet again in a far happier

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pier state of existence—a state, where they shall be so improved in every excellence, as greatly to heighten their esteem for each other — Where no misunderstanding shall arise—Whence they shall never be removed, but participate together a fullness of satisfaction and joy enduring for ever.

The END of the SERMON.

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ADDRESS for the CHARITY.

THUS far, we have applied the subject with an immediate respect to them who, by their situation, have it more in their power to make a distinction in the choice of their associates; and who have been blessed with those advantages of education, which are a considerable defence against the snares that are laid by the sons of folly and wickedness. But those there are, and not a few, especially in the lower classes of life, who have peculiar difficulties to surmount in both these views. Poverty, does indeed, by no means, necessarily infer impiety, nor meanness of condition profligacy of manners: but at the same time it is too notorious to be denied, that they are in fact often connected together.

Of how many poor children is it the wretched lot, to be descended from parents, who either want ability, or inclination, to assist their opening minds with that timely culture,
which

which is of the last importance to the production of those fruits of wisdom, on which their future comfort and usefulness depend—who, while they are surrounded with the most pernicious examples, which, like a contagious distemper, are daily spreading their baneful influence among all who come within their reach, have no friendly monitor near, to warn them of the danger, and, by wholesome instruction and discipline, to fortify their susceptible hearts against the ruinous infection which is ready to seize them! And shall such helpless objects be left a prey to these deadly foes of man? Shall they be abandoned to ignorance, idleness, profaneness, and vice, with all their dreadful consequences both in this world and that which is to come? What son of wisdom, who that has, in any degree, imbibed that spirit of benevolence, which is so essential to a religious character, will not pity their distressed situation; and, as far as it is in the power of his hand, contribute to save them from the infamy and wretchedness which threaten them?

Such is the generous view of the charitable scheme, now to be laid before you,

and of which I have received the following account from the worthy and respectable managers.

The PPRESENT STATE of the CHARITY-SCHOOL, in Gravel-Lane, Southwark.

The foundation of this school was laid in the year 1687, in the reign of King James II. when a school was set up by one Poulton, a Jesuit, and publick notice was given that he would instruct the children of the poor gratis. Upon which Mr. Arthur Shallet, Mr. Samuel Warburton, and Mr. Ferdinando Holland, laid the foundation of this school to avoid the dangerous consequences of a Popish school, and provide for the instruction of the children of the poor in the Protestant way.

The number of scholars at first was forty, afterwards increased to fifty, but now to two hundred: They are taught to read, write and cypher, and are instructed in the principles of our common christianity, and thereby qualified for the service of God and man. It may be said to be the first school the Protestant Dissenters were concerned in; and here objects are received with-

without distinction of parties, the common good being intended. It is situated in one of the poorest parts of this city, and the children of the poorest sort of Watermen, Fishermen and others are here taught without any expence to their parents, and are furnished with spelling-books, testaments, catechisms, writing and cyphering-books; and the girls are taught to sew and knit.

The charges have been defrayed by the gifts and subscriptions of private persons, with two annual collections, and the kind remembrance of the said school by some in their last wills.

You are, by this account, apprized of the origin, design, and extent of the charity, for which I stand here, the petitioner of your bounty. And what more can it be needful to add, to make you sensible of its utility and importance? Its object is—youth and innocence in the worst distress—launching out into a world of temptation—in the midst of the most fatal dangers—with little if any assistance, but that of rude unexperienced nature, to direct their course, or fortify them against the attack of those numerous enemies
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of their peace and happiness, to which they are on all sides exposed. And what object can be offered to your compassionate regard, better fitted to excite it, and which can more deeply interest the humane and pious in its favour? How tenderly must you feel for them, ye heads of families, whom providence has enabled, and principle has disposed, to bestow the necessary care on the choice pledges of your affection! Ye know, by experience, the endearments of parental relation; and cannot, therefore, be without the strongest emotions of sympathy with them, who, while they are not less solicitous for the welfare of their offspring, have it not in their power to give them such an education, as is highly necessary to qualify them both for the service of God and man, in those inferior stations which are assigned them. In your breasts, the charity now recommended must find a powerful advocate, which will plead the cause of the engaging objects before you with an energy not to be resisted. And who that beholds them, tho' yet a stranger to the endearing connection, and considers the beneficial effects which this charity is calculated to have upon them—the extreme mischief from which it may
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save---the substantial and lasting good which it may convey to them---its tendency to their own personal improvement and comfort in this world---the great advantage it may render to society---and above all, the influence that it may have on their eternal well-being.---Who, I say, that beholds the number of engaging objects before you, and attends to these many, inexpressibly desirable, and pleasing effects which this charity is intended, and which, with the blessing of the Almighty, it is likely to produce, can be without an earnest solicitude for its maintenance, or refuse the hand of liberality to assist in carrying it on?

To inforce this---I might recall to your closer inspection, the particular view of it---as an institution originally established in opposition to one formed by the artful contrivance of Popish emissaries; and constructed for the important end of counteracting the influence of that unparalleled system of craft and delusion, which is big with ruin to every thing that is worth living for. ---- A view of this charity, which must be peculiarly interesting to every friend of liberty and of man: and which merits a very particular
attention

attention in the present times, when the growth of Popery is so much and justly lamented. I might also urge, the truly Catholic ground upon which this charitable scheme is erected; the common good being consulted, and no one sect or denomination excluded from sharing in the benefit of it---a consideration, which gives it all the additional force of an institution, breathing the sublime, godlike, spirit of that noble dispensation of religion, the cause of which it seeks to promote.——

But I will not detain you longer, by expatiating on these, or any other arguments, in support of a plan, the very proposal of which carries such an ample recommendation along with it.---Go on, ye generous patrons of truth and goodness in the prosecution of this labour of love! And may the God of wisdom bless both you and the children! May they, through your beneficence, become useful and happy! And may you receive, from the Almighty Father of mercies, an abundant recompence at the resurrection of the just!

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